By EDGAR BREITENBACH

# Letter from Germany

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WHEN ONE CONSIDERS the state of utter deterioration into which most German university libraries had fallen by the end of the war, one must concede that they have made a remarkable recovery. Many buildings are being restored, and it is a hopeful sign that every now and then a reference will be made to a newly completed reading room or to additional stack facilities. In some libraries, higher budgets have permitted extensive book purchases, which partly compensate for the war losses.

The program for getting back to normal has on the whole made such satisfactory progress that at this point one is quite justified in asking: Are the university libraries again to resume their function as efficient tools of higher learning, and will they once again be able to provide the research scholar with his material, and to assist the student in his studies? Unfortunately, if one puts this question to the people who constitute the largest group of library users, namely the faculty and graduates, the answer is an emphatic "No." Significantly enough this negative attitude is to be found just as much in Göttingen and Münster, which have relatively adequate budgets, as it is in Würzburg and Kiel, where recovery has been slow due to limited resources. The loudest criticism comes from the scientists, some of whom would like to dissolve the university libraries altogether. The latter go so far as to propose that the books which are still considered useful for research and teaching be distributed among the institutes and seminars; the remaining books should be preserved in the main library, just as one preserves relics of the past in a museum.

Not everybody holds such extreme views, of course. Nevertheless, a recent public opinion poll has shown that there is universal agreement among faculty and students on the following points: reading room facilities are inadequate; opening hours are too short; there is always delay in obtaining the book one has ordered; the interlibrary loan service is appallingly slow and far too expensive; catalogs frequently perpetuate long outmoded systems; processing of new books takes far too long to suit the readers; there is frequently a lack of interest on the part of the librarian towards suggestions for acquisitions.

When confronted with these charges, the university librarian will very likely admit to most of them. In self defense he will then point out the difficulties on his side: his building is fifty or more years old; his budget is frequently too small because it is allocated by the ministeries of cultural affairs in the various "Länder," which have failed to give adequate support to the university libraries ever since the first world war; his staff is too small and often overworked; out of every group of four or five librarians with academic training, two are likely to be approaching retirement age, and are no longer pulling their full weight. If he happens to be a progressive man he will admit that the administration methods used in book processing are inefficient, that public

relations, particularly with the university, could be greatly improved, and that academic librarians as a body have an outmoded conception of their profession.

It cannot be denied that German university libraries are now in a state of crisis, a crisis which the war served to aggravate but did not cause in the first place. The real causes are the changing methods of scientific research, which has moved from the classrooms into the laboratories. As a result there has been an unprecedented and uncontrolled growth of highly specialized book collections in the institutes and seminars. Through the greater part of the nineteenth century the main library of the university could attempt to cover all fields of knowledge reasonably well, and to provide the tools for research and instruction. This time has long since passed, but since attitudes based on old traditions change slowly it has taken the university librarians a long while to realize that they must redefine the character and purpose of their own libraries, as well as that of the libraries of the institutes and seminars. The issue is further complicated by the fact that most German university libraries are administratively not part of their university, but are independent bodies under the cultural ministry of their "Land."

At the forthcoming annual meeting of the Association of German (academic) Librarians, the problem will be brought into the open. The main topic will be a discussion of a paper prepared by Dr. Gerhard Reincke entitled "Memorandum concerning the situation of the institute libraries and their relation to the university and high school (i.e. technical university) libraries."

This paper was commissioned last year by the "Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft," in order to find out whether it should continue to support the university libraries or transfer its assistance to the institutes, as many faculty members had requested. Although the report was published last fall, it has still not been officially released. A limited number of copies were sent to interested parties, together with a questionnaire, to sample their reaction to certain issues raised by the author. The replies, in a summarized form, will be submitted to the Conference of University Presidents (Rektorenkonferenz) for further discussion.

Dr. Reincke collected his material by visiting more than 250 institutes and seminars in 19 universities and technical high schools. In each instances he started his investigation by discussing the problems with the president of the university, the director of the university library, faculty members and the library staff. He endeavored to get a fair cross-section by selecting both large and small institutes, in some cases efficiently run and in other cases badly run. With regard to the university libraries, he paid special attention to purchasing policies, book processing, catalogs and opening hours.

One of the first things he noticed was that there is no clear distinction between the terms "institute" and "seminar." The popular notion that the former is more important than the latter is incorrect; there are quite insignificant institutes and very large seminars. Consequently he classified them according to the functions they fulfill, whether they primarily serve undergraduates, or are geared to the needs of upperclassmen who are writing their doctoral theses. To the former group belongs the majority of the institutes and seminars in the fields of law, social science and humanities; to the latter most of the institutes and seminars in the fields of science, medicine and technology. The difference between the two groups of readers is reflected in the organization of the libraries; maxi-

mum seating capacity, supervision, multiple copies on the one hand; privacy and no supervision on the other.

Large institutes of advanced studies constitute a third group, e.g., the institutes of the Max Planck Gesellschaft. These institutes usually call themselves "X" Institute at "Y" University, thus plainly indicating their quasi-independent character.

With respect to accommodation there is a wide variety depending on local conditions. At best the average student institute is located in the main auditorium building of the university. Law institutes are often housed in a special building, with a common law library. Similarly institutes in the fields of science and technology are usually located near to each other, and so are medical institutes and their libraries. There are many instances, however, particularly in social sciences and humanities, where institutes occupy totally inadequate quarters, frequently former apartment houses. Some are so short of space that they can offer few if any reading room facilities to their students. Nearly 10% of the institutes visited by Reincke have had to abandon the open-shelf reference system and revert to the stack and home loan system, which defeats the very purpose for which these libraries were created.

The size and contents of the institute libraries vary widely. Some are definitely too small for the needs of the students while other have grown to quite unwieldy proportions. Reincke illustrates this point with some interesting examples. In one place he found a law library of merely 7,000 volumes while in another place it contained 80,000 volumes. Some professors have built up large collections on special topics, often at the expense of their library in general, e.g., Theological Seminar in Kiel which among its 30,000 volumes has a vast number of hymnbooks and a comprehensive collection of books on Bedouins. At the same university the Institute for Theoretical Physics owns a library of 100,000 volumes, which includes the books of the Kiel Observatory. The material is all kept in the stacks, and can only be used by special permission. In Hamburg the Seminar for Ancient History has 35,000 volumes, including many which legitimately belong in other fields. The number of students using this library is very small.

Reincke thinks, and I believe rightly so, that minimum and maximum figures can be established for the various fields. The library of a law school might reach the saturation point with 40,000 volumes, while in such fields as history and theology the minimum basic collection is estimated at 7,000-8,000 volumes.

There is also a wide variety in the scale of the budgets of the institutes. An art history seminar may have DM1,200 in one place and DM6,000 in another. Law institutes were found to range between DM5,000 and DM16,000. Nearly everywhere the institutes receive a regular budget and a special budget which varies from year to year. Occasionally there are special donations from private organizations or from industry and business. Membership fees of the students are an important source of income. Institutes which publish books or periodicals use them widely for exchange purposes. When a professor is offered an appointment by another university, he usually makes his acceptance conditional upon a special grant for the institute he is to take over. On the other hand if he declines a new appointment, he may use this fact as a bargaining point to have his budget increased. Cases are known of eminent professors who used this technique to such good effect that they were able to get their institute libraries into excellent

shape. Worst off are the institutes in the humanities which have to make ends meet on a budget of DM2,500-3,000. Science institutes are a great deal better off, averaging DM10,000-12,000.

The rapid growth of the institute libraries has not been matched with an increase in personnel. Less than 10% of the institutes inspected by Reincke employ trained librarians, and these are mostly law libraries. Methods of library administration used around 1900 still prevail. As a rule it is left to the teaching or research assistant to take care of the library. Since he usually only stays for a few years, there is likely to be lack of continuity in the system of administration. Some institutes may not even have an assistant. In many instances the library is in the hands of a secretary or a nurse (in medical institutes). Reincke's survey of the personnel problems presents quite an alarming picture.

Under the heading "accession policies" Reincke states that nowhere did he find a clear concept of objectives. The original purpose of the institute libraries merely to provide students with reference tools has been abandoned in favor of building up comprehensive collections for research. The directors of the institutes justify this step by pointing out the general inefficiency of the main university library; the fact that they can no longer afford private libraries themselves; and also the fact that today instruction and research are inseparable. The result is that each institute director tries to be as independent as possible. They buy a great deal of collateral material, without too much concern that the same books may well be purchased by other institutes, possibly even in the same building. Special collections are started and subsequently abandoned when a professor moves on to another university or retires. Such practices are particularly unfortunate in view of the inadequate budgets.

Reincke paid special attention to foreign periodicals, which he found to be most inadequately represented. Of the institutes visited nearly 15% had either none or only one foreign periodical, 30% had between 2 and 5, 25% had between 5 and 10, and only 30% had more than 10 (mostly through exchange). Gaps in the sequences for the war years were the rule.

Nothing shows the need for guidance more clearly than the catalogs of the institutes, which for the most part were drawn up by amateurs. Although most libraries have at least an author catalog and many of them even have some kind of subject catalog, Reincke found several institutes where the staff insisted that a catalog was superfluous. One can only underscore Reincke's urgent plea that the university libraries concern themselves with this problem and lend their assistance wherever possible. This would indeed start a new era, for at present the main library's dealings with the institutes is limited to three types of transaction: it loans books in the regular manner; it makes so-called long-range loans which in case of recall are the cause of endless friction; and it handles requests for interlibrary loans for the institutes.

In summing up his findings Reincke makes a number of recommendations. For the university libraries he asks for modernized buildings, higher budgets and an increased staff. Furthermore, he demands a new professional attitude. The university librarians should maintain close liaison with the institutes; here is a potentially vast area of public service which up to now has been little explored. They should draw up agreements on book purchasing policies with the various institute directors and should solicit the latter's advice on book selection for the main library. They should assist

the institutes in setting up sound systems of library administration, and above all, they should see to it that the efficiency of their own libraries is vastly improved.

As for the institute libraries Reincke believes that a clear definition is needed as to what each of them shall collect, so as to avoid unnecessary overlapping. Little used material should be turned over to the university library. He is not certain whether a union catalog for the university as a whole would warrant the efforts and cost it entails, but he strongly advocates a union catalog of periodicals. Large institutes must obviously employ professional librarians; for the many smaller ones he suggests that institutes in related fields should share the services of a trained person. Merging of small libraries into a strong departmental library should be undertaken wherever possible (e.g. law, economics, theology).

For the American reader of Reincke's memorandum most of these recommendations will appear to be nothing more than common sense; for many German university librarians they amount to little short of heresy. The Forschungsgemeinschaft has already received a great number of protests from both the institutes and the main university libraries; far from being dismayed, it welcomes the fact that this issue has been forced into the open for general discussion.

An unbiased observer will scarcely challenge the facts as Reincke presents them, nor is he likely to take exception to the remedies he proposes. What is lacking, however, is a clear statement that the idea of universality, once embodied solely in the university library, must now be shared with all libraries within the confines of the university. Once this principle has been generally accepted, the artificial barriers between university libraries and institute libraries will gradually disappear. The university librarian should accept with good graces the inevitable developments in the academic world which are responsible for turning his library more and more into a central collection of less frequently used material—and at the same time, into a study center where students can consult and borrow books of current interest. By giving guidance to the institute libraries and by a policy of close cooperation the main library can nevertheless again play a vital part in the life of the university as a whole. Knowing the extent to which most German university librarians are bound by tradition and also the extreme individualism of the average German professor, I do not anticipate an early solution. However, the very fact that the discussions have begun is in itself an encouraging sign.

## The Aquisition of British Documents

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clumsy and non-cooperative attitude of the other two agencies to try these ways), and he finds that the well-meaning bookseller, doing this as a favor to a client, becomes swamped in the plethora and is unable to give good service.

The worst of this is not the poor method of distribution, although that is bad enough, but the bad impression created in this country of official British services. It would be gracious, wise and far seeing if the United Kingdom reactivated the depository system. Stanford would be glad to pay a lump sum annually for the "privilege." All means of protest having failed so far it is my hope that some eminent visiting Englishman will become aware of the situation through reading this plaint and upon his return home make representations to improve this sorry business.